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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR
DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: CALM CAMPAIGN CLOSES WITHOUT PROVOCATIVE
STATEMENTS ON STATUS

REF: PRISTINA 775

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The three-week campaign period ended on November 15 with most talk of Kosovo's status being successfully kept out of the fray. The pre-election deal struck among the main K-Albanian parties held and kept the tone of discussion of non-status issues positive for much of the campaign. While the press has been filled with the usual wave of pre-election promises and one-upmanship, parties showed a notable degree of political maturity and discipline regarding status. The uncertainty surrounding voting outcomes for the various parties also helped forestall vicious inter-party attacks, since all main political players understand that no one party will dominate and coalition-making will likely be fluid. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Kosovo's three-week election campaign period ended on November 15 with a predictable burst of activity and political stunts, including a 58-meter pizza for ORA, the Veton Surroi-led party at number 58 on the Kosovo Assembly ballot. Cars and buses with party billboards careened around Pristina, with campaigners shouting slogans over loudspeakers. The press has been full of party ads, with main opposition party PDK in particular filling newspapers with glossy half- and full-page ads for its Kosovo Assembly and mayoral candidates.

13. (SBU) During the campaign, parties made big and mainly fabricated promises -- increasing employment, fighting corruption, supporting independence -- but they stuck to their agreement not to make provocative statements about status or unhelpfully set a date for declaring independence. The pre-election agreement, which included the main ethnic Albanian political parties of LDK, PDK, AAK, and ORA, also seemed to set the tone for parties to run positive, rather than attack-oriented, campaigns. There was little mud-slinging between LDK and PDK, which by conventional wisdom are battling for first place and have been at times bitter rivals; PDK leader Thaci held back his worst criticisms of the current LDK-led government, hoping to create a conducive environment for a possible LDK-PDK coalition should the numbers support such an outcome.

Rather, it was Bexhet Pacolli's AKR that bore the brunt of political attacks from all sides, mostly for its leader's alleged ties to Russia and the former Milosevic regime.

14. (C) COMMENT: It is noteworthy that the major parties managed not to exploit Kosovo's single most emotional issue -- status -- for political purposes during the campaign. No part of the Ahtisaari plan, whether decentralization or additional rights for the Kosovo Serb community, came under attack during the weeks of party jostling. The pre-election agreement, initiated by President Sejdiu, bears some of the credit for keeping things relatively civil, but even more compelling was the understanding that even former rivals may need to consider coalition arrangements if the voting outcomes break that way. USOP will monitor election-day events closely and report on the conduct of elections and early results, some of which could come as soon as Sunday, November 18 (reftel), though only informally. END COMMENT.
KAIDANOW